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Described, in detail, in this speech is the implementation of the Silver City, New Mexico elementary school program to stress bicultural orientation and linguistic development. After brief introductory remarks concerning the identification of the bilingual problem and language teacher responsibility for initiating new bilingual educational programs, there are discussions of (1) program planning, (2) the development of awareness and support at administrative, staff, and community levels, (3) instructional aids and materials, and (4) program design. Reproduced for reference is a memo from the Spanish teachers designed to enlist the support of their fellow-teachers by making them cognizant of the bilingual instruction rationale. (AF)

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B.O.L.D.

BICULTURAL ORIENTATION AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

PAPER PRESENTED BY

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AT THE NATIONAL CONVENTION

OF THE

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS

OF SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE

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A PROGRAM CALLED B.O.L.D.[1]

For the first time since the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the schools of the Southwest are focusing attention on the needs of the Spanish-surname population. Recently Congress indicated its awareness of the problem by passing the E.S.E.A. (Elementary and Secondary Education Act), Title VII, the Bilingual Education Act.

I wish to speak, not about the dreams and hopes of my people but about the practical steps necessary to create the programs that will make the dreams come true.

The people of the Republic of Mexico have produced great artists, cardiologists, architects, writers, and engineers. Yet our own Mexican-Americans with the same ethnic background can not even produce the expected percentage of professionals. In schools which group students according to ability the Spanish-surname students make up the bulk of the lowest groups. It is ironic that middle-class children from Mexico who enroll in our schools, learn English faster and better than our own native-born Mexican-Americans.

Dr. Bruce Gaarder of the United States Office of Education asks if there is something about our schools that damages our Mexican-American children.[2] We can safely say that the policy of stamping out the native languages of the Southwest has stunted the intellectual growth of our children. In Los Angeles with its large concentration of Mexican Americans, the University of California at Los Angeles with an enrollment of 25,000 in 1966-67, had fewer than 100 Spanish-surname

1. Bicultural orientation and linguistic development.
2. Bruce Gaarder, The Spanish-speaking Child of the Southwest Symposium, Tucson, Arizona, 1966

students, many of whom were foreigners.[3] There were probably fewer than 1/3 of one percent Mexican-Americans. At Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley there were even fewer.

Any experienced teacher in the Southwest is aware of the fact that many of our Spanish-surname children can not compete with the Anglo-American in academic achievement because of limited command of English. In addition to the language handicap the Mexican American must combat the feeling of inferiority of a people who know very little of their own cultural heritage.

Identifying the problems is easy enough. But whose responsibility is it to initiate the educational programs to remedy the situation? Certainly it is in great part the responsibility of the language teachers. We can not expect the administrators with their many and varied problems to plan and sell creative programs to the public. And the language teachers dare not pioneer them either. Many of us prefer to retreat to our little towers to dissect a few novels, moan about the deplorable conditions, and occasionally cry about about impossible dreams. The majority of us hide behind the prevalent, hypocritical attitude that there is something indecent about politics. Actually it is politics and politicians which make the wheels go around whether it is in government, large corporations, or schools. Let us stop moaning, and start planning the programs. Let us go out and sell them to the school boards, the administrators, and the public.

3. Julian Nava, Educational Problems of the Mexican-American, Cabinet Committee Hearings, El Paso, Texas 1967 p. 97

In Silver City, New Mexico, we were fortunate in that the Director of Instruction, Calvin Short, planned the program with us and convinced the School Board that our plan was sound and that in the long-run would save the taxpayers money.

The next step was winning the support of our fellow-teachers, The following memo was sent out:

Memo from the Spanish teachers:

This is addressed our our fellow-teachers who have their doubts about the advisability of giving bilingual instruction to the Spanish-speaking students in our elementary schools. We do not question the motives of those who differ with us, nor do we question their right to challenge our ideas. All of us share a deep concern for the welfare of our children. It is only proper that we debate the merits of each program. At this time we would like to explain our viewpoint.

Let us suggest a horticultural experiment. Go to the nursery and buy an expensive rosebush. Cut off all the roots and plant the stump. Water it carefully. If it doesn't produce beautiful roses add fertilizer and spray it. Spare no expense. And in the end you will still have a stump.

This sounds silly. But compare it to what we do to the Spanish-speaking child from some socio-economic groups:

1. When the child enters the first grade he makes the break with the mother, as do all the other children.

2. The Spanish-speaking child from these groups also loses the comfort of the language with which he has communicated his needs and his feelings. The fact that he knows a little social English misleads the teacher into believing that he understands academic English.

3. The facial muscles of the teacher may be expressing a certain feeling or attitude to the children brought up in her culture, but may be expressing something totally different to the child of another culture. This child loses the security of his own cultural interpretations. He is bewildered.

4. The teacher feels self-conscious about pronouncing foreign words. She rationalizes that it is time the child becomes "Americanized", in other words like "her". His name is Epifanio, so she calls him "Eprie". What the teacher does not realize is that indirectly she is telling him the name his parents chose is not good enough. He concludes that his parents are not good enough, and therefore he isn't either.

In one day the child has lost his mother, his culture, his language, and his name. What is left? Regardless of what others think of the language the child speaks, it is still his. When he gets to high school the Spanish teachers will deflate what is left of his ego by informing that he doesn't even speak good Spanish.

The first day of school the child starts to feel ashamed of his people. The language with which he can make his little private jokes, the one in which he can excel, the one whose rhythms are pleasing, is now forbidden. His self-image is blurred, his self-esteem is crushed. On that first day the child will start to develop that curiously ambivalent attitude, so common among the Southwest "hispano", an attitude of self-hate combined with a fierce love for all the symbols of his culture.

The roots have been cut. Now we can plant the stump. We can devote our energies to watering it, spraying it, and giving it remedial care.

Einar Haugen who has written a bibliography and research guide on bilingualism says:

> The emotional involvement of most people with the language first learned has been elaborated to triteness. It is associated with the deep impressions of the child's life experience of the world, which are verbalized for him in the mother tongue. The language loyalty which is founded in this way usually supersedes all others, but is often upset in immigrants and in speakers of substandard languages, who are required to learn some other language dominant in their area. New attachments can be formed in situations where the circumstances of learning are pleasant and no social rejection has set up feelings of antagonism.[4]

Mr. Haugen may be right in saying that this emotional involvement with the mother tongue has been elaborated to triteness. Maybe this is true among scholars. Unfortunately it is not true among the teachers who work with these children. Most of us are not aware of what is involved. The brushes of the elementary teacher with foreign languages have usually left only a residue of uneasiness and suspicion of anything foreign. Being a nation of immigrants, many have a second-generation complex about the "old country".

Those of us who teach these children often wonder why so many of them have such dull personalities. Their little faces are like masks. They have developed no charm, no wit, no elan. In high school they are sullen. One suspects they harbor unkind feelings towards the school and society. And all because in our desire to make a yellow rose out of a red rose, we threw away the roots.

Note that we have been talking about the children of certain socio-economic groups. There are some Spanish-speaking children whose parents have given them a sense of identity. They understand their roots and their place in society. Unfortunately there are not many.

4. Sol Soporta, Psycholinguistics, (1966), p. 299.

After the memo circulated, many of the teachers pledged their support. Encouraged by this, we repeated the message to service clubs, women's clubs, neighborhood associations, Office of Economic Opportunity workshops, and to anybody who would listen.

The next step was to make our own staff aware of the background of the children. We invited the parents of one class to visit the school. It became obvious that many of our children never hear standard English at home, seldom have newspapers, magazines, or books. There are mothers who live in two or three-room houses with ten children. When the older ones come home from school it is easier to send them out to play. A mother who is overwhelmed by her own frustrations is not interested in her children's school-day experiences. In the poorer sections of town it is easier to hate the neighbor than to love him. Televisions and radios are turned up so a child must learn inattention to survive in the bedlam. A child who never sees anyone reading or writing, may not see the point of learning to read and write. Many 6-year-olds who have never traveled more than a few blocks from home, find school a frightening place. Going from the first to the second grade may seem natural to a middle-class child. But it is naive to believe that all children think this is important. To compete, to want to excel is not necessarily natural to all children.

Our young teachers begin to see that in most schools of the Southwest, it is assumed that most children are the same. The "barrio" child in this situation is soon aware of his own unworthyness and then introduced to the antiseptic, never-never land of Dick and Jane. Is it any wonder they don't learn to read? The children are not the

only ones who are frustrated by the old approach. The first-grade teacher would like to see her children succeed.

Our new program is called B.C.L.D., bicultural orientation and linguistic development. The aim is to teach the children to maneuver in two cultures and to learn both languages. The principals help us find the 6-year olds who have the greatest problems in language. Many of them also have psychosomatic and emotional problems. The English program is designed for speakers of other languages, using audio-lingual techniques and following the natural sequence of sound language learning. The E.S.E.A. (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) Title I language laboratory is used to improve the pronunciation and to reinforce patterns drilled in the classroom. Many visual aids are used to introduce concepts and to make the class activity more lively. We have more than 1,000 staff-prepared transparencies and hundreds of cards, besides the Peabody kit cards. The tapes used in the laboratory were developed by the Applied Language Research Laboratory, a Title III project of the El Paso Public Schools. From the very first day, the teachers reward hard work and originality with flattery. The children are encouraged to look at themselves in the full-length mirror and to learn to like what they see. Affection and praise turn out to be a pretty intoxicating combination. Even the most frightened child begins to enjoy competition. There is an air of excitement about every lesson. Social studies and science lessons are taught in Spanish. The Miami Linguistic series is used to introduce reading.

Spanish is taught to all children in the first six grades. For the Anglo-American the Spanish program is one of cultural enrichment. To the "hispano" it is much more. The Spanish teachers try to improve the children's command of Spanish to meet the standards appropriate to educated speakers. Transparencies and cards are used to introduce each lesson. The bilingual stories which are used to teach reading are based on the exploits of Spanish, Mexican, and Indian heroes. These stories improve the self-image because they provide heroes where none existed. Poetry, music, and art of the Spanish-speaking countries prove so popular that parents send in requests for copies or sources. The Spanish teachers constantly repeat the pitch, "Learn to maneuver in both culture groups, the dominant and the minority". This becomes easier as the children learn more about their own roots and understand their place in American society.

This is not altogether a success story. Most of the bilingual programs are doomed to failure, because they can not be staffed properly. The universities have not prepared bilingual teachers, and have not helped the elementary teachers understand the cultural heritage of the Mexican-American. Some years ago at a workshop in my state, some well-meaning teachers spoke of the importance of telling the children of the accomplishments of our people. They wanted the children to be proud of their ancestors, so they taught them the "varsoviana", and explained that the Spanish-speaking people had given the Southwest such popular foods as tacos, tamales, and enchiladas, and such common words as burro, corral, and rodeo. On the surface this seemed frightfully patronizing. Are the people who gave the world a Cervantes and a Goya to be flattered when given credit for "el taco"?

However these good women were doing their best. That was all they knew about us.

The general public's idea of the history, literature, and art of the Spanish-speaking people is based on the contributions of the travel writers who exploit the picturesque. A boy driving a team of oxen is more picturesque than a boy walking to a bilingual school in Mexico City. Children's books on Latin America are usually about a barefoot boy and his burro, a barefoot boy and his parrot, or a barefoot boy and his clay pot.

The people who are best prepared to write on Spanish and Spanish-American topics do not write for the general public. Most professors of Spanish would rather write erudite articles to impress each other. It is very difficult to find bilingual materials of general interest. Language departments should prepare these bilingual materials, and should encourage young Mexican-Americans to enter the teaching profession. Language classes should be exciting and should help the students discover a new world of new speech patterns, new ideas, new cultural interpretations, different gestures, and even a new sense of humor, instead of merely teaching the students to mouth new words.

If the bilingual programs are to succeed the universities must take up the challenge and send us dynamic, creative teachers. Congress can give us millions of dollars, but only the universities can give the "chispa", the spark, which will ignite the interest of our young Mexican-Americans and prepare them to lead our people out of the "barrios".